

The Growing Threat of Hamas

Hamas' war against the Jewish state took a dangerous turn in February when, by breaching the border wall between Gaza and Egypt, Hamas terrorists were able to cross into the Sinai Peninsula and threaten Israel along the entire Egypt-Israel border.

How dangerous is the Hamas threat? More than 120 Qassam rockets struck southern Israel in a three-day period in mid-January—and more than 400 rockets and mortar shells were fired during the month – nearly 5,000 have been fired since Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. In addition, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations have been smuggling longer-range Katyusha rockets, thus placing 250,000 Israelis living in southern cities such as Ashkelon directly in the line of fire.

Yet Israel has responded to Hamas' provocations with remarkable restraint. Prime Minister Olmert promised Palestinian President Abbas that Israel would allow supplies into Gaza and prevent a "humanitarian disaster" there. However, if Hamas' attacks against Israeli civilians continue, Israel could conceivably be forced to take more serious action in Gaza.

While the Gaza-Egypt border was wide open, Palestinian terrorist groups reportedly exploited the wild, unsupervised mass movement of people in order to ship heavy weapons by the truckload. This Hamas military threat from Gaza poses grave dangers to Israel and to the prospects for peace.

Hamas has manipulated international media and diverted the world's attention from its unprovoked rocket attacks on Israel to Palestinian suffering. When Israel instituted economic sanctions on Gaza in response to the recent barrages of rockets, Hamas made sure that those sanctions affected Palestinian civilians rather than its own infrastructure.

In a cynical attempt to demonstrate that disruptions in power supply force Palestinians to endure darkness, Hamas staged a candlelight session of its Gaza parliamentarians—with curtains drawn in the middle of the day. As usual, Hamas chose cynical theatrics over its peoples' welfare.

Hamas also tried to present the surge of Palestinians into Egypt as evidence of Palestinian "starvation" under Israel's sanctions, although, as *The Washington Post* pointed out, "no one is starving in Gaza."

The world should not be fooled by Hamas' attempt to pin blame on Israel. The responsibility for the minimal economic sanctions that Israel continues to implement lies with Hamas, which fully controls Gaza and could stop the rocket attacks—and thus the sanctions—at any time.